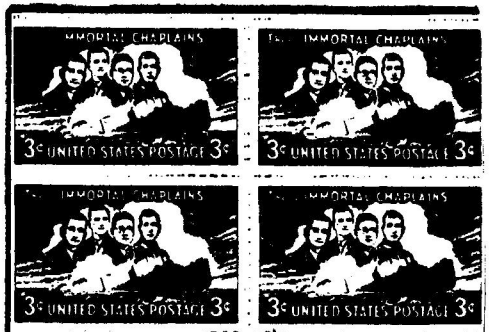

The Four Chaplains

By Ed Breen 2/3/85

We've got two stories here. One is about a young man who, twice a month, drove the Indiana flatlands from Cincinnati to Marion . . . commuting before commuting was even a word. The second is about a bitter night 42 years ago today — a story of faith, of wartime courage and of death.

Goode

The first story first: The year was 1936. Alexander D. Goode was not yet 30 years old and in the last year of rabbinical training at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. A scholarly Jewish man from Washington, he had decided he did not want to be a lawyer; he wanted to be what his father was: A rabbi of the Hebrew faith.

As a part of his training, he was acting as student rabbi for the Hebrew congregation in Marion.

The storm clouds of war were brewing over Europe, but that was a long way away from Indiana and Ohio. The young man was concerned about completing his education, becoming a rabbi and having a congregation of his own.

The Marion Jewish congregation recently had completed the Sinai Temple at the corner of Sixth and Boots streets, having met the previous 20 years in a house at Ninth and Adams streets.

But, because the congregation was not large, it had never been able to support a full-time resident rabbi. It had always relied on the senior students from the Hebrew Union to minister to its needs. That year of 1936, Goode was the student.

"He was one of the better ones we had," recalled Julian Secttor, sorting the image of Goode from all those others — one a year over 45 years — who had served in Marion.

"He was very handsome, very kind," said Mrs. Adolph Abel, who also was a member of the 1936 congregation. "The thing that I remember most about him was that he seemed to be very kind. In every way he was just a fine young man."

Skip now, if you will, a few years. Goode has become a rabbi, with a congregation of his own in York, Pa.

He is married and is the father of a baby daughter, Rosalie. He has even taken the time to earn a doctorate degree in Oriental languages from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

But the storm clouds have burst in Europe. World War II is raging across the continent and on another front in the Pacific.

Rabbi Goode has decided his place is with the American troops, ministering to a congregation of brave and frightened young men. He has become a military chaplain . . . and that is the start of the second story.

In late January, 1943, Rabbi Goode has been assigned to a troop ship, one of four chaplains aboard the *U.S.S. Dorchester*.

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His clerical companions are a Catholic priest, Father Johnny Washington, and two Protestant ministers, Rev. Clark Poling and Rev. George Fox. The four will share a cabin on the ship.

They are among 900 men stuffed into the decrepit and barely seaworthy *Dorchester*. There is considerable grumbling. "She's nothing but a lousy old freighter . . . she's no bigger than a life raft," one seaman remembers saying.

But the *Dorchester* and its human cargo is moving in a convoy of troop ships. It is bound for Greenland, a god-foresaken end-of-the-world port that is a staging area for American troops in the North Atlantic.

Storm squalls and heavy seas put the ship into what old seamen call "a devil's dance," a pattern of pitching and rolling and bouncing and trembling. The ship doesn't ride the waves; it crashes through them.

The *Dorchester* can't keep up and falls to the back of the convoy. By late on Feb. 2, the old tub is alone in the ocean. A Coast Guard cutter blinks a message across the dark waters to the *Dorchester* that a German submarine is prowling the neighborhood.

The ship radios the convoy, asking for assistance. None is available.

It is approaching 1 a.m. on Feb. 3 and most of the men are asleep, many without lifejackets on.

The German submarine commander centers the *Dorchester* in the crosshairs of his periscope and orders a torpedo launch. The torpedo is on targert, ripping through the steel wall of the *Dorchester* and exploding with full fury in the engine room.

One hundred men die instantly in their berths below deck.

Panic seizes the survivors. Empty lifeboats are hurled into the frigid waters, where they bounce on the waves near the sinking ship.

The four chaplains — Rabbi Goode, Father Washington, Rev. Poling and Rev. Fox — are doing what they can. They stand on the heaving deck, helping the troops into life jackets and urging them into the water.

"Get away from the ship — fast!" a survivor remembers one of them yelling.

And a young soldier, barely a man, is pushed and shoved toward one of the chaplains:

"Padre, I've lost my life jacket and the extras are gone and I can't swim."

"Take this," the chaplain says. "I won't need it. I'm staying."

The other three chaplains follow suit, giving up their life jackets. And as the ship begins to slide into the churning sea, the four chaplains stand on the deck, arm in arm.

In a few seconds it is over. The ship, the helpless victims and the four chaplains have gone to a watery grave.

In the months that followed, hundreds of survivors were interviewed. There were two consistencies in their recollections: None knew which of the chaplains surrendered his life jacket first and all had vivid images of the chaplains standing on that doomed deck.

As time passed, the four chaplains became *The Four Chaplains*, a wartime symbol of faith and courage.

Today, 42 years after the awful morning, they have not been forgotten. An art glass window in the chapel at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point preserves that moment. A chapel, the Chapel of the Four Chaplains, stands at 1855 N. Broad Street in Philadelphia, a living memorial dedicated to ecumenical religious studies created by Rev. Poling's father and now directed by Temple University.

And today, at 7:30 p.m., at the Marion VA Medical Center in Marion, a memorial service will commemorate the heroism of *The Four Chaplains*.

Including Alexander D. Goode, that handsome and kind young man who once taught and preached 32 blocks north of the VA chapel.

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